

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
September 18, 2007**

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, September 18, 2007 at the Red Lion Hotel, Wenatchee Room, 1225 N. Wenatchee Avenue, Wenatchee, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Dick Ford, Dan O'Neal, Ed Barnes, Bob Distler, Elmira Forner, Carol Moser and Dale Stedman.

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Ford introduced Commissioners and staff and welcomed meeting participants and guests. He provided a brief overview of the Commission's role and responsibilities.

WELCOME AND OVERVIEW OF LOCAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Dennis Johnson, Mayor, City of Wenatchee, pointed out the City of Wenatchee's geographical limitations result from its surrounding terrain (mountains and rivers) causing traffic to be funneled into the community via bridges. Even though the community is not large it is twelfth in density of population on a per square mile basis. The population within the city limits is just over 30 thousand, however the population swells by 15-20 thousand on a daily basis as the hub for retail trade and services within the region. The Stellar and Wenatchee River Bridges are the only means of travel in and out of the city creating congestion. In recent years the city has taken advantage of funds from the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) Curb Grants that have allowed for many improvements within the community that move traffic east/west to two major arterials within the community. The city's goal has been to improve east/west connectors between these major connectors to relieve some of the traffic on the north/south route. He noted that the Curb funds are going into waterfront transportation improvements and movement of vehicles along with the development of other assets for the community. This has spurred private investment and major improvements in the area. On the horizon are a North Wenatchee Corridor Study and a Burlington Northern grade separation crossing at Holly Street.

Steve Lacy, Mayor, City of East Wenatchee, pointed out that the City of East Wenatchee became a city in 1935 and has continued to expand. Because it is on the bluff side of the river and has more space for growth than its sister city Wenatchee. He explained that traffic growth has created a need for transportation corridor improvements on the eastside to meet the demands of moving people and products as growth continues to make demands on the system. He commented briefly regarding airport planning and zoning issues.

Russell Clark, Mayor, City of Rock Island, explained that Rock Island is eight miles south of East Wenatchee on SR 28. It is a rural community with a population of about 886 residents as of the last census. The community does not have congestion problems, but does need continued funding for pavement overlays and chip seals.

METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND NEW INITIATIVES

Jeff Wilkens, Executive Director, Wenatchee Valley Transportation Council (WVTC), provided an overview of the WVTC governance structure. He noted that the region has been successful in setting up the MPO as a regional forum that includes all of the cities, counties and ports, as well as participation from transit and the Department of Transportation. Wenatchee is the hub for the region. The Columbia and Wenatchee Rivers directly impact getting in and out of the region. With state highways that are not equipped to handle the areas growth. The solutions to local congestion are very complex and very urban in character, scale and cost. The transportation plan does not emphasize public transit, but it is a lesson learned that there is a tremendous potential for transit to be a strong component of the region's mobility options. There are a number of factors that setup the region to take an aggressive transit approach to congestion and mobility in the valley. It is the Council's intent to focus on this concept. Four years ago the priority was four lanes on Interstate 90, but a careful look determined that it is a secondary priority. Connections within the community became a primary focus as opposed to improving outside connections to the community. With that said the Council has taken a closer look at the airport and commercial air service. It may be the more significant access in and out of the valley-in terms of connecting to the local changing economy. The desire and the need to four-lane I 90 is there and desirable, but it has fallen back on the priority list.

There are two bridges crossing the Columbia River at the far north and south ends of the valley creating a tangle of congestion within the city. Even though the congestion is north/south the travel demand is east/west. After extensive analysis it has been found that the only solution is to add another bridge across the river to deal with north/south and Sellar Bridge congestion.

Because the area is low on lane miles it does not enjoy the benefit of federal investment for state highways, county roads or city arterials. Although the community is small in size it is still experiencing urban congestion. In closing he provided an overview of mega projects that are included in their transportation plan.

Richard DeRock, Link Transit General Manager, explained that Link is a small transit agency that provides transit services for Chelan County and Western Douglas County. With receipts under \$10 million annually it has difficulty competing with large metropolitan systems for limited transit funds. Link is a successful transit agency with coverage and ridership at or near levels prior to Initiative 695 in 1999.

Big concerns are aging coaches and improving substandard bus stops with safety issues in urban areas. Partnering with county and city governments Link is considering using transit to help ease the north/south congestion in the Wenatchee area. Because of traffic congestion additional buses will need to be added to keep existing schedules that will cost an estimated \$2.3 million per year to the transit system in less than 15 years. Perhaps this problem should be resolved now by the transit system playing a broader role. An option that has potential is called bus rapid transit - a high frequency all- day service that is competitive with traffic. This service would probably include: queue jumper signalization, signal preference and preemption and shared use of rail right of way.

REVIEW OF STATE HIGHWAY AND BRIDGE PROJECTS IN WENATCHEE METROPOLITAN AREA

Don Sarles, North Central Assistant Regional Administrator, WSDOT, provided an overview of transportation projects and maintenance in the area, focusing primarily on larger projects. He emphasized the increased cost of maintenance, materials, equipment and issues with funding.

Senator Joyce Mulliken and Mike Wren representing Transco, a Grant County based transportation partnership shared a similar problem posed earlier in the year by some County Commissioners in Eastern Washington; so much time is needed to complete preliminary studies and arrange funding, that the land needed is no longer available.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Paul Locke, citizen, shared his concerns regarding the high cost of transportation projects.

Rob Eaton, Mayor Pro Tem and City Councilmember, City of Leavenworth, expressed his concerns regarding proposed passenger rail rule making. The problem is that the proposed changes are directly incompatible with the operational and safety issues where passenger and freight rail share the same lines.

John Huselton, President of Entiat Chamber of Commerce, shared his concerns regarding an unsafe speed limit at the north end of the city.

Chair Ford requested that the Department of Transportation look into this issue and report findings to the Commission.

Dennis Hendricks, East Wenatchee City Council, submitted written comments indicating his concerns regarding safety needs for SR 2 and SR 28.

Chair Ford introduced Joint Legislative Transportation Committee members; Representatives Clibborn, Flannigan, Jarrett, Springer, Takko and Senator Jacobsen.

TRANSPORTATION ACCESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Craig Larsen, Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce and Port of Chelan County, provided an overview of positives and negatives of personal income growth in the area from 1970 to 2000. The region is not over dependant on any one thing. It has a large agricultural base, an aluminum plant along with new economic drivers that have been added in recent years. Pangborn Airport has been the number one economic development priority since 2005.

Representative Clibborn noted that there are emerging transportation issues all around the state.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING AND SMALL METROPOLITAN AREAS

Jeff Wilkens, Executive Director, WVTC, provided an overview of Confluence 2025, the Strategic Transportation Plan for the Wenatchee Valley.

Commissioner Moser noted that the WTP addresses economic development to higher degree than legislation.

Ms. Hammond noted that WSDOT has struggled with putting a value on economic growth and opportunity in rural areas. How do you put a value on the health of the state's economy and the need for the state to invest in an area where there is not yet congestion, but there are development opportunities, how do you weigh that against critical capacity and congestion relief needs in Puget Sound.

Mr. Wilkens questioned if the correct measurements are being used.

Commissioner Distler emphasized that our focus must be kept broad and not just on projects in the two-county area, but things that benefit the people in the two-county area. The problem is finding a metric that somehow allows us to measure economic development benefits. This is difficult!

Commissioner Forner elaborated on economic development. She noted that emerging economies should be diversified throughout the state.

Representative Clibborn thanked the Commission for its invitation to speak today. Gas tax dollars can be politically restrained. We need new revenue sources to move forward and regional funding is one source of primary focus.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m., on September 18, 2007.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chair

ELMIRA FORNER, Vice Chair

EDWARD BARNES, Member

DALE STEDMAN, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

CAROL MOSER, Member

ROBERT S. DISTLER, Member

PAULA HAMMOND, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Governor's Office

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL